



CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN NEWS

1721 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
8425 WEST 3rd STREET

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515
LOS ANGELES, CALIF. 90048

202-225-3976
213-651-1040

Washington Report
by Henry A. Waxman
Congressman, 24th District

May 30, 1980

ISRAEL FACES NEITHER WAR NOR PEACE

Unfortunately, the peace for which Israel and her friends have for so long yearned does not appear to be on the horizon for the 1980's. The thrilling expectations I felt when I sat in the Knesset two and one-half years ago when Anwar Sadat delivered his historic speech are now but a bittersweet memory. Neither the promises of the first Sadat-Begin talks nor those of the Camp David Accords have been fulfilled.

Rather, the Middle East situation has deteriorated. Sadat is more isolated than ever before from the rest of the Arab world. Palestinians under Israeli rule appear more dissatisfied and more inclined to extremist views than they did just a year ago. The "rejectionist bloc" has become more virulently anti-Israel -- if that is conceivable.

In the midst of all these gloomy reflections there is one extremely bright spot: right now war against Israel is impossible. Why? First, President Sadat appears to be totally committed to a policy of nonbelligerency against Israel. This is due, no doubt, primarily to his heavy dependence on the United States, rather than to the goodness of his heart. Regardless of his motives, Sadat's unwillingness to wage war against Israel is the central military and geo-political fact of the Middle East today. Even the most unrealistic and hysterical Arab war mongers know that a war against Israel without Egyptian participation would fail within hours.

There is a second reason to believe that Israel is safe -- at least for now -- from the threat of all out war. Arabs, Israelis and neutral military experts agree that the Israelis now enjoy substantial military superiority over the Arabs.

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Though greatly out numbered, the Israelis make up for their numerical weakness with superior weapons and technology, better trained forces, superior military intelligence, and an infinitely greater sense of unity and purpose.

Of course, central to Israel's military superiority, has been steadfast American military and economic aid. Without this assistance no amount of Israeli determination or talent could prevent this small country from becoming a certain victim to the everready Arab predators which surround her.

Of the factors that could disrupt the status quo, as a Jew and as a United States Congressman, one concerns me above all others: there could be a decline in American support for Israel. Even a slight decline could be misread by the Arabs with disastrous results. We ought not only increase support to Israel but also withhold support from Syria and other countries that have deliberately undermined chances for peace.

The status quo could also be smashed by the death of President Sadat. No one knows who would succeed him or what Israel's fate would be under his successor. Finally, the status quo could be altered by domestic problems within Israel. Economically, the Israelis have been pushed to the wall by one of the world's highest rates of inflation. Demographically, Israel has been hurt by a massive outflow of young people and by the decision of the majority of Jews leaving the Soviet Union to settle outside Israel.

The twilight between peace and war in which Israel now lives is not a happy one. It is bound to be marked by such tragedies as the killings at Hebron and the sporadic acts of Arab terrorism which become no more bearable as they become more familiar. Yet, in the light of Israeli losses in four wars over thirty years even a dim twilight, free of open conflict, is worth going to any length to preserve.

END